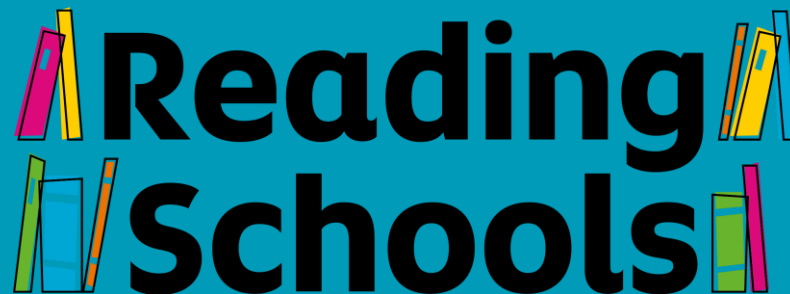


Research-informed practice on reading for pleasure



Introduction

- Types of research
- Research at Scottish Book Trust
- The importance of evaluation

Our research

Our aim is to empower everyone in Scotland to reach their true potential through reading and writing. All of our work is driven by research and has lasting and far-reaching impact. Discover how we use the power of research to make a difference as a charity and improve people's lives.



[Research at Scottish Book Trust →](#)

Latest news and articles

←	<p>Research at Scottish Book Trust An overview of our research and research team.</p>	<p>How to give feedback and find it useful Sign up for our research team to start helping your reading.</p>	<p>Demerits and why reading matters A review on the impact that screen reading can have on paper story books.</p>	<p>Reading maps of Scotland Discover what reading is doing today across Scotland.</p>	→
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Research projects

Discover the research projects we're currently working on and contributing to.

[View all research projects →](#)

←	<p>The impact of book gifting in Scotland Investigating the success of book gifting by charities such as us.</p>	<p>Women of Words Reading group longevity in communities, mother telling and parenting.</p>	<p>Tackling the drop off: understanding the teenage reading experience Why some reading clubs struggle to survive.</p>	<p>Growing up a Reader What does it mean to be a young reader in the 21st century?</p>	→
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Programme evaluation reports

We use independent evaluations and public surveys to measure the impact of our programmes and improve what we do.

[Find out more about our impact →](#)

←	<p>Arts After evaluations How does the impact of the programme?</p>	<p>Reading in Claring evaluations Insights at our own - in reading in Claring pilot.</p>	<p>Reading in Claring 2020 evaluations Insights at our 2020 activities and pilot project.</p>	<p>Reading in Claring 2021 evaluations Insights at our reading across pilot projects.</p>	→
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Research and evidence on rfp

- Attainment and equity
- Health and wellbeing
- Critical thinking
- Empathy
- Resilience

Attainment and equity

The academic research

Analysis of PISA data 'shows that increasing reading engagement could mitigate 30% of the attainment gap associated with socio-economic disadvantage'.

Sosu, E., & Ellis, S. (2014). *Closing the attainment gap in Scottish education*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/closing-attainment-gap-scottish-education>

Analysis of Growing up in Scotland data shows that frequent reading at home is one of only three factors proven to have an impact on the vocabulary gap between the most and least well-off children – an impact which occurs regardless of parents' level of education.

Scottish Government. (2019). *Growing up in Scotland: Changes in language ability over the primary school years*. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/growing-up-scotland-changes-language-ability-over-primary-school-years>

Attainment and equity

The academic research

The National Literacy Trust's annual survey found that young people who enjoy reading are three times more likely to read above the level expected for their age than children who don't enjoy reading; young people who read daily in their free time are twice as likely to read above the level expected for their age than children who don't read daily.

Clark, C., & Teravainen-Goff, A. (2020). *Children and young people's reading in 2019: Findings from our Annual Literacy Survey*. National Literacy Trust. <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/children-and-young-peoples-reading-in-2019/>

Through analysis of PISA data, the OECD found that whether or not a child enjoys reading is more important to their educational success than their family background, with reading four times more influential on intellectual progress in adolescence than having a parent with a degree.

Kirsch, I., de Jong, J., Lafontaine, D., McQueen, J., Mendelovits, J., & Monseur, C. (2002). *Reading for change: Performance and engagement across countries: Results from PISA 2000*. OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/programme-for-international-student-assessment-pisa/33690904.pdf>

Attainment and equity

The academic research

A Belgian study found that children who read because they enjoy or value it read more and have better reading comprehension. Statistical analysis showed that it wasn't the quantity of reading that led to better comprehension, but the fact that they had chosen to read themselves. Conversely, the more a child felt they were 'forced' to read, the worse their comprehension scores, regardless of how much they read.

De Naeghel, J., Hilde Van Keer, M.V., & Rossee, Y. (2012). The relation between elementary students' recreational and academic reading motivation, reading frequency, engagement, and comprehension: A self-determination theory perspective. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(4), 1006–1021. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027800>

Attainment and equity

Evidence from Reading Schools evaluation

'A P7 boy, who lives in one of the more socially deprived areas of the village, had very little interest in reading. We have struggled throughout his primary years to engage him, and this has impacted his attainment and opportunities for success. The drive to increase library membership is what has impacted him. He lives near the library, so he now gets off the bus a stop early and visits the library regularly on his way home from school. He loves to show his latest new book and the increase in the amount he reads has been significant. He is "hooked"! This in turn has increased his attainment and he is now reading at expected levels and is in a strong position for moving on to find success in high school.'

Attainment and equity

Evidence from Reading Schools evaluation

'Polish children within our school are now given opportunities to come together to speak in their first language using books to support discussions and to structure sessions. This is led by a Support for Learning Assistant and a P7 child. The families of the children are delighted that the children's cultural language is being recognised and valued. Prior to Reading Schools, there were no opportunities for these children to come together. One P7 boy who has autistic tendencies is usually found on his own in the playground and limits his social interactions with others. As lead of this group, we have seen him much more expressive and smile when he is in the group!'

Attainment and equity

Evidence from Reading Schools evaluation

'I think the Reading Schools scheme literally gave both pupils and staff "permission to read". Life in a secondary school is very much geared towards tasks, timetables, homework, assessment etc. We needed the opportunity to recognise that simply sitting with a good book can and does contribute to attainment, as well as having a multitude of other benefits. We now recognise reading – just reading – is enough. The 10–15 minutes reading at the start of every lesson has been transformative. It calms and focuses pupils, setting the tone for the remainder of the period so the whole lesson benefits, even when it is not related to books.'

Health and wellbeing

The academic research

Analysis of data from the Millennium Cohort Study found that:

- Reading for pleasure increases self-esteem at age 11, regardless of demographic, socio-economic, and familial confounders.
- Daily reading for pleasure at age 7 is associated with lower levels of hyperactivity/inattention and better prosocial behaviour at age 11. Results also showed that daily reading for pleasure was associated with lower levels of emotional problems.

Mak, H. W., & Fancourt, D. (2019). Arts engagement and self-esteem in children: Results from a propensity score matching analysis. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1449(1), 36–45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.14056>

Mak, H. W., & Fancourt, D. (2020). Longitudinal associations between reading for pleasure and child maladjustment: Results from a propensity score matching analysis. *Social Science & Medicine*, 253, 112971. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.112971>

Health and wellbeing

The academic research

The National Literacy Trust's annual survey found that children who are the most engaged with literacy are three times more likely to have high levels of mental wellbeing than children who are the least engaged; attitudes to reading are more strongly linked to mental wellbeing than frequency or perception of skill.

Clark, C., & Teravainen-Goff, A. (2018). *Mental wellbeing, reading and writing*. National Literacy Trust. <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/mental-wellbeing-reading-and-writing/>

Our own research with the University of Edinburgh found that children and young people report numerous emotional benefits of reading, including helping them to relax, lightening their mood and offering an escape from daily stresses.

McGeown, S., Bonsall, J., Andries, V., Howarth, D., & Wilkinson, K. (2020). Understanding reading motivation across different text types: Qualitative insights from children. *Journal of Research in Reading*. 43(4), 597–608. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12320>

Wilkinson, K., Andries, V., Howarth, D., Bonsall, J., Sabeti, S., & McGeown, S. (2020). Reading during adolescence: Why adolescents choose (or do not choose) books. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. 64(2), 157 –166. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1065>

Health and wellbeing

Evidence from Reading Schools evaluation

'One of our ASN pupils had incredible difficulties with her behaviour and social skills. She struggled to engage with others. Through reading, she was able to plan a reading activity to share with younger pupils. She gained so much confidence and self esteem from completing this activity.'

'The children have described reading time as relaxing, time to be calm, quiet time, switch off, a time to escape. The classes also choose the time that suits them best to stop and read. This has allowed the staff and their children to take ownership of this time. The staff have reported this as a time they didn't know they needed. A time to stop and enjoy their own book for 15 minutes each day was beneficial.'

Health and wellbeing

Evidence from Reading Schools evaluation

'Reading can help if you're feeling sad, and it can make you feel better.' – P6 pupil

'Reading helps calm me down when I feel anxious and makes me feel better when I'm sad because it's like returning home.' – High school pupil

'When I'm grumpy, reading makes me feel happy and calm again.' – P3 pupil

'They're consuming more than just the words. They're able to really understand the underlying message and they're learning that emotional language. They're able to explain what they're feeling and why they're feeling it much more.' – Parent

Critical thinking

The academic research

The National Literacy Trust found that only 2% of children have the critical literacy skills they need to tell if a news story is real or fake; 61% of teachers believe fake news is harming children's well-being, increasing their anxiety levels. They conclude: 'it's obvious really that one of the most powerful weapons in the battle against fake news is literacy: children need to read widely.'

National Literacy Trust. (2018). *Fake news and critical literacy: The final report of the Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy in Schools*. <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/fake-news-and-critical-literacy-final-report/>

A 2013 Canadian study found that readers have less need for 'cognitive closure' and more comfort with disorder and uncertainty; the need for cognitive closure can result in 'seizing' on an early statement in the process of acquiring knowledge, 'freezing' on the seized idea, and remaining resistant to additional information, which hinders rationality as well as creativity.

Djikic, M., Oatley, K., & Moldoveanu, M.C. (2013). Opening the Closed Mind: The Effect of Exposure to Literature on the Need for Closure. *Creativity Research Journal*, 57(2), 149–154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2013.783735>

Critical thinking

The academic research

A participant in our own research with readers told us, 'although I read for enjoyment, I believe a side effect has been that an increased knowledge and understanding about the world and people and different viewpoints, which helps me to see problems in my life with perspective and not get too wrapped up in them, giving me more background information to make life decisions, giving me critical skills to try to see things in an objective way instead of being emotive, e.g. politics and media.'

Scottish Book Trust. (2022). *Reading in Scotland: My Life as a Reader*. <https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/our-impact/reading-in-scotland-my-life-as-a-reader-report>

Critical thinking

Evidence from Reading Schools evaluation

'We have a boy who moved from overseas last year. Due to having EAL he can struggle with literacy tasks, and this can negatively impact on his behaviour. We have introduced lots of graphic novels and picture books to the class. Recently we were reading and discussing *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan. When I asked if anyone had chosen to read it this boy raised his hand. When we went on to discuss the book, the insight this child had and the inferences he had deduced were astute. Through discussion, it was clear he was able to analyse the images and interpret the meanings on a relatively deep level. His lived experience of moving to a strange land made him the expert. It was wonderful to see him so engaged and animated in this lesson.'

Critical thinking

Evidence from Reading Schools evaluation

'Parents agreed that their children's reading skills have improved, stating that they talk in more depth about books and are now able to analyse the stories they read.'

'Our children now have a voice to express their opinions on books.'

'I like reading with other people and doing a "post-match analysis" of the book.'
- P7 pupil

Empathy

The academic research

A 2006 Canadian study found that those that read fiction had better social skills, and people who become absorbed in a story had higher empathy scores.

Mar, R. A., Oatley, K., Hirsh, J., dela Paz, J., & Peterson, J. B. (2006). Bookworms versus nerds: Exposure to fiction versus non-fiction, divergent associations with social ability, and the simulation of fictional social worlds. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 40(5), 694–712. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2005.08.002>

A 2015 study carried out in Italy and the UK demonstrated that reading fiction can help children develop a better understanding of, and reduced prejudice towards, those they perceive as different from them.

Vezzali, L., Stathi, S., Giovannini, D., Capozza, D., & Trifiletti, E. (2015). The greatest magic of Harry Potter: Reducing prejudice. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 45(2), 105–121. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12279>

In our own research with the University of Edinburgh, children and young people told us that one of the reasons they read was to develop empathy for others through experiencing new places, situations and perspectives.

McGeown, S., Bonsall, J., Andries, V., Howarth, D., & Wilkinson, K. (2020). Understanding reading motivation across different text types: Qualitative insights from children. *Journal of Research in Reading*. 43(4), 597–608. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12320>

Wilkinson, K., Andries, V., Howarth, D., Bonsall, J., Sabeti, S., & McGeown, S. (2020). Reading during adolescence: Why adolescents choose (or do not choose) books. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. 64(2), 157–166. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1065>

Empathy

The academic research

'Connecting with characters in books can help us understand, explore, and experiment with our identities and improve our perspective-taking skills. As well as feeling like we are connected with fictional characters, studies using fMRI have shown that reading about them is related to activity in specific parts of our brains. IAT studies have also shown that reading about different characters can help us really identify with them, perhaps even taking on some of their characteristics for a while.'

Webber, C., Wilkinson, K., Duncan, L., & McGeown, S. (2022). Connecting With Fictional Characters: The Power of Books. *Frontiers for Young Minds*. 10, 658925.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/frym.2022.658925>

Empathy

Evidence from Reading Schools evaluation

'One S2 pupil would not engage in any reading activity but since the increase of new, inclusive books in the library they regularly come to class and are able to sustain reading books that they see themselves in. The ability to have LGBT books has given this pupil confidence.'

'The children are more empathetic and are able to talk about their feelings and the feelings of others.'

'The book they read on the refugee journey opened up such a range of conversations. It was fantastic! The diversity of their books is so important.' – Parent

Resilience

The academic research

A 2018 RCT in the US found that reading with babies and children has a long-lasting impact on their behaviour, reducing the chance of difficulties with aggression, hyperactivity and attention as they reach school age.

Mendelsohn, A. L., Brockmeyer Cates, C., Weisleder, A., Berkule Johnson, S., Seery, A. M., Canfield, C. F., Huberman, H. S., & Dreyer, B. P. (2018). Reading aloud, play, and social-emotional development. *Pediatrics*. 141(5), e2017339. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-3393>

A 2019 UCL study researched how almost 48,000 people experience creative activities, finding that creative activities help us to regulate our emotions, a skill that is vital for good mental health and helps us deal with challenging situations.

Fancourt, D., Garnett, C., Spiro, N., West, R., & Müllensiefen, D. (2019). How do artistic creative activities regulate our emotions? Validation of the Emotion Regulation Strategies for Artistic Creative Activities scale (ERS-ACA). *PLoS ONE*. 14(2), e0211362. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0211362>

Resilience

The academic research

A 2015 study from the University of Liverpool reported that, 'for readers, navigating their way through daily life appears to be just slightly easier than it is for non/lapsed readers. Regular readers report a greater ability to cope with difficult situations. Reading can offer richer, broader, and more complex models of experience which help a person to view their own lives from a refreshed perspective. Reading expands people's repertoires and sense of possible avenues of action or attitude. People who read find it easier to make decisions, plan and prioritise which is further evidenced in a greater ability to make time for friends – meaning they have more time to enjoy the benefits of social connectedness.'

Quick Reads. (2015). *Reading between the lines: The benefits of reading for pleasure*. https://www.letterpressproject.co.uk/media/file/The_Benefits_of_Reading_for_Pleasure.pdf

Resilience

Evidence from Reading Schools evaluation

'One of our learners in P5 has ADHD and although she has well-developed reading skills she does not choose to read in school. During our 'softstart' she would often have disagreements with others and would not always make good choices with regards to behaviour. This often meant she did not have a positive start to the day. Through our 'Reading Volunteer' project she now loves to read to younger pupils in the morning. She puts on her lanyard and goes off to classes to find others who would like to hear a story. She enjoys talking to the younger pupils, talking to them about book choices and organising them so they are ready to listen to the story. She has a purpose to this time now and has a sense of responsibility. Her class teacher noted she is more willing to read in class and is really ready to begin her learning each day.'

Resilience

Evidence from Reading Schools evaluation

'One particular child really struggled with being in school and understanding the demands of everyday school life. When our library spaces were fully developed, this child absolutely loved the safe, calm and relaxing environment and used it every day. He spent hours reading books and playing with den building materials. The support assistants loved using this space too. I would say that as a result of Reading Schools this child was much happier, safer and willing to engage in his learning.'

'One particular individual in upper primary has a diagnosis and struggles with his behaviour. He now uses reading as a regulation strategy to calm himself down, taking himself into the library for some personal time.'

Any questions?

**What resources on
research would you
find useful?**

Thank you

scottishbooktrust.com



schools@scottishbooktrust.com